

IMPROVE YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Practical Tips for Maximizing Your Devotional Time

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What is the Bible all about?

If you want a big-picture view of the entire Bible in just a few minutes, I believe I can give that to you using 12 words (that all happen to begin with the letter S) that covers everything from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation.

We can start with the word **SIN**, which describes the act of man disobeying God in Genesis 3. As a result of this disobedience, mankind experiences a **SEPARATION** from God, so that they no longer had the same access to God they enjoyed before sin.

Early on in the garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve's sin, God told them He would not punish them according to what they deserved, them. but he took an innocent animal and made a **SACRIFICE** to create animal skins to cover God's **SOLUTION** to the problem of sin was to create a nation of people called the Israelites that would be separate and a light to the rest of the world.

However, this nation failed and allowed the sinful nations around them to influence them, rather than the other way around. After Israel's repeated disobedience and failure, God sent **SEERS**, more commonly referred to as prophets, to warn the people of Israel to repent of their sins in order to avoid God's righteous judgment against them. Israel did not listen, and as a result they were kicked out of the promised land God had given them.

The Old Testament ends as God has allowed them to return to that promised land, and they are **SETTLING** back in.

When we begin the New Testament, we see that God has sent a **SAVIOR** into the world as His ultimate solution to the sin problem. The first several books of the New Testament, the gospels, contain a series of **STORIES** about the life of Jesus Christ, His teachings, and the miraculous things He did on earth, including His death on the cross as the sacrifice to atone for our sins. Then the book of Acts contains the story of the founding of the church after Christ's ascension to heaven, and how the gospel went out from Israel to the nations as God intended.

This gospel went to the world through **SPOKESMEN** called by God, such as apostles like Peter, John, and Paul. As a result, the gospel began to **SPREAD** widely. But many people disagreed with the gospel, struggling to believe that Christ was Lord. So, the church experienced extreme **SUFFERING**.

In the beginning of the Bible, we see that sin appears. But at the end of the New Testament, we see that **SIN** disappears. Adam and Eve's sin led to death. But in Revelation, there is eternal life in Christ. There's a new heaven and a new earth. God's original design that began in Genesis gets restored.



How did we get the Bible we have today?

One of the most common questions people ask about the Bible is, “How do we know the 66 books in the Bible are the only writings inspired by God?” People wonder whether there may be books missing from the Bible, or whether there are books that are included in the Bible that shouldn’t be.

The first thing to know about this subject is that the church did not determine which books were inspired by God. They discovered which books were inspired. They recognized through a process which books were and were not inspired. What criteria did they use to find this?

The church would come together periodically in councils to discuss this issue. In 397 AD, the canon of the Bible was set during the Council of Carthage. They asked several questions:

WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT THIS BOOK?

Around 250 B.C., the Jewish community had already established that the 39 books we call the Old Testament today were the word of God. When Jesus came along, He quoted from it, affirmed it, referenced it, and taught from it, putting his stamp of approval on these books.

WAS THIS BOOK WRITTEN BY AN APOSTLE, A PROPHET, OR SOMEONE CLOSELY RELATED?

This question was important because apostles and prophets often demonstrated the power of God through signs, wonders, and miracles. The idea is that if they were able to perform miracles from God, then their message about God was credible.

Jesus also said that people would believe in Him through the messages of the apostles:



"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message." John 17:20

The apostles who wrote scripture were also eyewitnesses of the very things they were writing about.



"For we did not follow cleverly devised tales...but we were eyewitnesses to His majesty." 2 Peter 1:16

IS THIS BOOK CONSISTENT WITH OTHER SCRIPTURE?

A book that was thrown out as heretical is the gospel of Thomas. Here's a quote from that book that gives an indication why it was thrown out:



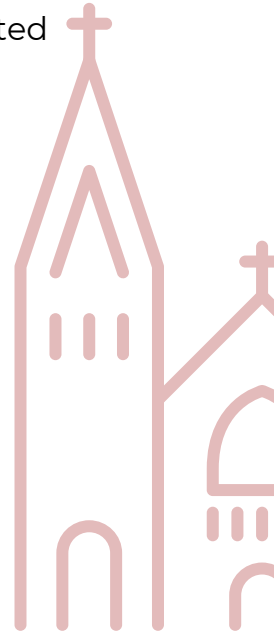
"Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary go away from us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said: 'Lo, I shall lead her, so that I may make her a male, that she too will become a living spirit, resembling you males...'"

This book did not tell the truth about God, and was not faithful to what Jesus taught and represented.

WAS THIS BOOK ACCEPTED BY THE EARLY CHURCH?

Did the early church leaders preach from this book? Did the leaders sense the power and presence of God in this book? If the answer was yes (in combination with the other questions), then that book was accepted as the inspired word of God.

It takes faith to believe that God is powerful enough to use flawed and fallible men to write His word, and to preserve and arrange it so that His people in generations to come are able to govern their lives by that word.



[Watch the video on YouTube!](#)

How do we know Paul's letters are God's word?

Every so often, you'll run into someone who will say they only believe the things in the Bible that are printed in red, because those are the actual words of Jesus. But they don't trust that the apostle Paul's letters are really the inspired word of God, because he was just a man like us. They'll ask why they should believe what Paul said any more than what anyone else says.

This is a question of canonicity, which is just a fancy word for "how did we get the Bible we have today?" We know that the Old Testament is accepted as canon because that was firmly established by the Jews by the time Jesus was born, and then Jesus affirmed it as God's word. And most people don't question the gospels, because these narratives and teachings of Jesus are heavily attested to in ancient literature. Acts is a book of history that can be verified. But then you get to Paul's letters, and some people think those are just Paul's opinions.

One reason for this is that some people find a few of Paul's teachings a bit offensive, such as when he wrote "I do not permit a woman to speak in church." Another reason for this doubt comes from 1 Corinthians 7:12:



To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 1 Corinthians 7:12

Paul was not questioning or devaluing his own apostolic authority in this verse. Rather, he was simply saying “This is not an issue that Jesus addressed, or that was addressed in the Old Testament, so therefore I’m giving you my understanding of it from God.” Here are some reasons why we can trust that Paul’s writings are the word of God:

PAUL BELIEVED HIS MESSAGE WAS THE WORD OF GOD



If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 14:37



For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Paul believed he was preaching and writing the inspired word of God, but this doesn’t necessarily make it true. This alone isn’t strong enough to verify his words as canon, so let’s go on.

PAUL INDICATES THAT HIS MESSAGE WAS KEPT HIDDEN



No to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest... Romans 16:25-26

If this was the case, that Paul's message had previously been kept hidden by God, then it makes sense that Paul was introducing something new to the boy of Christ that Jesus had not previously revealed. The gospel is a mystery that was hidden from generations past.

PAUL'S MESSAGES ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE REST OF SCRIPTURE

This is a major factor in establishing that Paul's letters are God's word. Nothing Paul says is inconsistent with everything else that was revealed in scripture, so there's no reason based on the content of his words to believe that they were not inspired by God. Paul's messages include salvation by grace through faith, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, God's grace to the Gentiles, God's desire to unite Jews and Gentiles, our struggle against the sinful desires of the flesh, the importance of prayer, and how spiritual gifts are to be used in the church and order is to be maintained.

PAUL HAD DIRECT REVELATION FROM GOD



“Then he told me, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. For you are able to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard.’” Acts 22:14-15

Ananias was a direct witness of the experience Paul had with God, so we know they weren’t just making this up.

PAUL’S LETTERS WERE VIEWED AS AUTHORITATIVE BY THE OTHER APOSTLES



And remember, our Lord’s patience gives people time to be saved. This is what our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him—speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of scripture. And this will result in their destruction. 2 Peter 3:15-16

The apostle Peter put Paul’s writings on the same level as scripture. Paul’s letters were also considered scripture by the early church.

JESUS PREDICTED APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY



*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it
Matthew 16:18*

Jesus made it clear his church would be built on men like Peter, to whom He gave authority.



Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. Ephesians 2:19-21

Paul acknowledged that Christ was the center, but that it was also built on the prophets and apostles.

Conclusion

We must have faith in our God who we believe was sovereign over the process by which our Bible as we know it came to be. We don't believe that God would have His people misled and obeying things that should not be considered God's word for all these centuries.



His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 2 Peter 1:3



[Watch the video on YouTube!](#)

Which Bible translation should I read?

Which Bible translation should you read? Are the older translations like King James better than newer ones such as the New Living Translation or The Message? I'll give you the three main types of translations here, as well as pros and cons for each of them.

It's important to state up front that there are no perfect English translations of the Bible. That's because the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. As an example of why that can be a problem, there are about 5 million Greek words compared to only about 1 million English words. So, there are times where it's difficult to find an English word that carries the exact specificity and depth that some Greek words may have.

WORD FOR WORD TRANSLATIONS

Word for word translations are written at approximately an 11th or 12th grade reading level. Translators for these attempted to translate each Hebrew or Greek word and preserve the exact word order. Some examples are New American Standard, English Standard, King James, and Amplified versions.

The pro on these is that they are very close and consistent with the original language. However, a translation like the King James Version can suffer in terms of readability due to the old English language.

The Amplified version adds additional words parenthetically to add more clarity to the meaning. The downside to this is these additional words are subject to the translators' interpretations, meaning it's not perfect.

THOUGHT FOR THOUGHT TRANSLATIONS

These versions are the result of translators not focusing so much on word order, but translating entire phrases to focus on what exactly the passage is saying and the ideas in the passages. This makes it easier to read, like the New International Version or the New Living Translation, and they're written at a 7th or 8th grade reading level. However, this can somewhat water down the meanings of some words.

PARAPHRASES

These aren't really translations at all, but rather they take entire chunks of scripture and rewrite them into very easy-to-understand language, at a 4th or 5th grade level. The con here is that it takes away specific, detailed words and adds other replacement words, which can really obscure some meaning that can only be gleaned by knowing what words were originally there. I would only use a paraphrase Bible as a secondary resource to another more accurate translation.

The answer for which translation you should read is: Whichever one works best for you (as long as it is faithful and accurate). I personally find the New Living Translation to be the best combination of accuracy and readability, and recommend the Life Application Study Bible as a great place to start.



What book of the Bible should I read first?

One of the greatest challenges for people trying to start their personal Bible study is simply figuring out where to start! It can be overwhelming to look at this huge book and try to figure out how to tackle it. Do you start in the Old Testament at the beginning? Do you read chronologically? Do you start with the gospels? I can help! I'll tell you what worked for me when I was first getting started, and I'll also tell you what has worked for other people that I've helped get started for themselves.

Let me say though that there is no “wrong” way to start, and if the Holy Spirit leads you to read something, you should do it. But having a plan of attack can help make it more fun, more fulfilling, and more productive. First, we can start with the process of elimination.

I would **NOT** advise someone just getting started to jump into any books of prophecy, such as Ezekiel or Revelation. There's simply so much symbolism in these books, and things don't mean what they appear on the surface to mean, so a new reader could get completely lost and confused by starting there. Also, to understand prophecy, you need to understand the context that is set up by the other books in the Bible.

Now, starting with a narrative book like Genesis can be great. You start at the very beginning, and you see the set up of God's creation and the origin of the people of Israel.

Many readers power right through Genesis and Exodus, and it's very exciting! But then they hit Leviticus and it's like a brick wall because there are so many laws and seemingly obscure commands that don't necessarily make sense to them. Many Bible reading plans have died in Leviticus! So even though Genesis is the beginning, Starting with Genesis and just reading straight through from there might not be the best idea.

I would encourage someone just getting started to start in the New Testament. One reason is that very few of the New Testament books are contingent on understanding the books that came before. You can read the book of Philippians, whereas you don't have to read what came before it. You can't just do that with an Old Testament book. So where do you start in the New Testament? I think you should start with the gospels. Primarily because if Christian you need to get to know Jesus and get equipped to tell others about Him.

If you just try to start by reading through the entire Old Testament, it could be a year or even two years before you finish that and get to the New Testament to study about Jesus, the foundation of your faith! You need to know who Jesus was, what He did, and how he lived.

The second reason to start with the gospels is that everything else in the Bible points to the gospels. The entire Bible is about Jesus. Everything before the gospels looks forward to Jesus, and everything after the gospels refers back to Jesus.

What do you read after the gospels? The book of Acts! This is a narrative book that chronologically comes after the gospels. It tells of the birth of the church, which is relevant because we are still living in the church age today.

After that, you can move on to some of the shorter New Testament books such as letters by Paul like Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, etc. because it will give you confidence and a boost from completion, as well as it will be a very practical and applicable set of readings.

If you really want to start with an Old Testament book, I would encourage you to read the book of Proverbs. There are 31 proverbs, and most months have 31 days, so you can read one every day to get through the book. This book is so practical and easy to read!

Here are some more tips to get started:

FIND A SPIRITUALLY MATURE “BIBLE COACH”

This person can mentor you and answer your questions, so you're not figuring everything out for yourself.

PURCHASE A STUDY BIBLE

Good study Bibles contain maps, commentaries, concordances, book overviews, and everything you need to understand what you're reading before and as you read it. This might not be cheap (\$25-50) but it's important to invest in your spiritual life.



CHOOSE A COMFORTABLE, ACCURATE TRANSLATION

Not every translation is good, but I would recommend New King James, New Living, English Standard, New International, or New American Standard versions as great ones to start with!

Read from different versions to find a main one, and also to get a different perspective on passages.

USE OTHER RESOURCES TO STUDY

Try the YouVersion Bible app, which has a great search function to find relevant scriptures



Download my free eBook

It's called [The Bible Story](#), and it gives you a short but thorough overview of the entire Bible narrative, so no matter what you read in the Bible you understand what's going on at that point.



[Watch the video on YouTube!](#)

Should I do a one-year Bible reading plan?

At the end of every year, many Christians start evaluating how their Bible study habits were in the past year, and think about what changes they want to make next year to be better and more consistent. One thing people often commit to doing after that evaluation is to read the entire Bible in one year.

This past year, I decided to give it a try and read through the entire Bible, and after having done so, I want to share the good and the bad of that experience, and give you some tips on how to approach this goal if it's something you choose to attempt.

PROS

The first benefit is that a one-year Bible plan gives you a pre-set plan for what to read every day. Many Christians struggle to be consistent with their Bible study due to the lack of a plan. They wake up every day knowing they should read the Bible, but they don't always know exactly what to read. So as a result most days they don't end up reading anything.

You won't have this problem if you're on a one-year plan. You have no excuse, because there is something waiting for you to read literally every day. This can help create the kind of discipline you might struggle to develop otherwise.

Another benefit is that you get exposed to the entire Bible. Sometimes we get caught up only reading certain portions of the Bible, either because they interest us, or because we're familiar with them. For most Christians, that means the New Testament, Psalms, Proverbs, and a few of the more well-known Old Testament stories like Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, and Moses.

We seldom dive into books like Ezekiel, Obadiah, 2 John, or other relatively obscure books of the Bible. A one-year plan will force you to go through parts of the Bible you wouldn't normally seek out, but which are just as important as the others.

A one-year plan will give you a big picture understanding of how the entire Bible comes together. A majority of Christians you meet have never read through the entire Bible. If you haven't, you should really consider it because the Bible is God's precious love letter to us—what message does that send to God if we only read 10% of it? A yearlong plan will also show you portions of the Bible you'll want to return to for more in-depth study later.

CONS

On the negative side, a yearlong plan can begin to feel legalistic after a while. It can start feeling like just another daily exercise that you do only to check off the box of completion. I can confess that there were many days when I would have the daily audio Bible on in my car, but I wasn't really consuming it like I wanted to. I was just trying to get it done. That's the danger of a one-year reading plan.

It also restricts you from reading outside the plan. Many people devote maybe 30-45 minutes of quiet time to God in the word.

If it takes you that long just to read our daily plan, you might feel like you don't have any time left to study topics you're actually interested in, or that are more relevant to you.

Most people will honestly struggle just to get through their daily reading plan, so it will be difficult to branch outside of that.

Finally, a one-year plan can create pressure to always be moving forward. What I mean is that when you read, you might come across some scriptures where you would prefer to just hang out and meditate on them, but you feel like you can't because you want to complete your daily reading. The Holy Spirit may want to speak to you, and you're just pushing forward because of a plan.

TIPS

Now, if you do choose to go on the one-year journey, I have some advice for you.

Consider an audio Bible. I used one called the Daily Audio Bible, which was fantastic. You have the option to read or listen, you get different translations every week, it has achievements and an online community, a feature called the "prayer wall," and explanations every time you get to a new book of the Bible.

Don't get behind! If those days start piling up on you, pretty soon you'll feel so overwhelmed by how much you have to read that you'll just quit. Or, you'll start skimming through to catch up, and then you won't be getting any value out of it.

Remember that the one-year plan is for Bible reading, not Bible studying. The purpose is not to dig deep into the biblical meaning of everything you read. You can do that if you want, but it's not the purpose of the plan. The purpose is to expose yourself to the entire word of God.

Consider a chronological plan. Most plans just take you book by book, but since the Bible isn't in chronological order, you don't always get the benefit of seeing how the individual books connect. For example, many of the prophets lived during the time of 1 and 2 Kings, but in the order of the Bible, the books of prophecy come way after 1 and 2 Kings.

Consider a shorter plan so you can have the best of both worlds: A plan to keep you disciplined, and also time to get into some more in-depth study on things outside the plan.

Get an accountability partner, because doing this with someone will be much easier than doing it alone, and when you feel like giving up, you'll have someone to encourage you to keep going.

Consider doing either the Old or the New Testament, and break it up into a two year effort to read the whole Bible. This might be more manageable.

Regardless of how you choose to read the Bible, make sure you choose a plan! If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.



How can I get more consistent with Bible study?

How was your last year of Bible study? It's easy for us to have all the best intentions, but somewhere along the line, we get off track. Here are seven practical ways to get more consistent.

BE INTENTIONAL

How do you accomplish this? You have to have a plan in place for what you're going to study. Don't just open your Bible and flip around looking for inspiration. Choose one of these ways to study:

- **Character Study**
- **Book Study**
- **Topical Study**

That way, when you open the Bible in the morning, you know what your plan is, and you don't have to waste time figuring out what you'll study.

BE INFORMED

You have to understand why it is important to spend time with God in his word. If you don't have the right "why," it will become a mundane, routine task that we do to check off the "good Christian" box. There are great benefits to Bible study:

- Prepares you for ministry. You must have the word in you in order to pour it into other people.
- Prepares you to share and defend your faith. You can't make disciples, lead people to Christ, or answer objections, without studying well.
- Girds you against temptation. The spirit of God works in us by bringing the word to our remembrance in times of temptation.
- Develops spiritual character. We can only be Christlike if we spend time with Christ.

BE CREATIVE

Sometimes we are inconsistent with the word because it gets stale and boring. You have to switch it up and try new things to make your Bible study interactive. Use audio Bibles, podcasts, or online Bible plans.

These things are super helpful, but they don't replace time spent with God. So use them at times, but don't overly rely on them.

BE ACCOUNTABLE



Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 NIV

You may need to join some sort of organized Bible study to literally force you to get into the scriptures in order to have something to share with your accountability group. Sometimes it's important to have things that are required. Study with a friend or group that will make you spend time with God.

BE STUDIOUS

Sometimes we just read the Bible without really studying it. But it gets repetitive when you just read without learning something new, having the experience of the Holy Spirit revealing things to you through the word. That will make you want to spend time with God. If you're just going through the motions, you'll feel defeated, and you'll become inconsistent.

BE PATIENT

Be patient with yourself. Bible study should not be a legalistic thing you do to make yourself feel better. Be consistent with yourself. If you can only give five minutes right now, be consistent with that as you build up. Understand your limitations in life in different seasons. Your kids or lifestyle may force you into different routines and schedules.

BE FOCUSED

You may need to go on a fast for a season to get back in a rhythm of spending time with God. You might need to give up food, exercise, television, or social media so you can force yourself to go deeper in time spent with God.



What Bible apps should I use?

We always want to find ways to improve our Bible study and be more consistent, but sometimes life gets in the way. One thing that has helped me in this area is having some helpful and convenient (and free!) apps on my phone that allow me to get in some quick Bible time wherever I'm at. Here are four that I consider essential!

GOT QUESTIONS?

If you've ever wondered where I get half of the ideas for videos I do on my YouTube channel, many of them come through this app. In the app, I like to browse questions by topic when I have a little down time.

There are hundreds of thousands of questions broken down by categories, such as God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, the church, and more. The app provides some great background and answers, and it's easy to just get lost in this app finding more and more valuable biblical information.

BIBLE.IS

I use this app all the time when I'm in my car and don't feel like listening to the radio, or when I'm taking my kids to school and wasn't able to get my morning devotional in.

This app contains a variety of audio Bibles in different translations, styles, and even languages. It also has the text of the Bible for you to highlight or take notes, or share verses or passages with others.

ONEPLACE

This app is a collection of some of the best Bible teachers we have today, with their sermons and podcasts. Tony Evans, Chuck Swindoll, Chip Ingram, and many, many more great Bible teachers are available on here for convenient browsing and listening.

BIBLE APP BY OLIVE TREE

This app has the ability to find reading plans, save different translations, and see your reading history. There are a ton of different plans for targeted study or whole-Bible reading. This is a great app for people just seeking some structure and guidance in terms of how to get started and be consistent in reading the Bible.



[Watch the video on YouTube!](#)

Do Christians need to read the Old Testament?

What if someone came to you and said that Star Wars was their favorite series of movies, but then they told you they had only seen one or two out of all the movies? Wouldn't that be strange? Well, that's what many Christians do with the Bible. They say it's their favorite book, but they've actually only read a small portion of it—usually the New Testament.

But the Old Testament makes up about two-thirds of the Bible! So I want to tell you why it's so important that every Christian reads all of the Old Testament.

THE OT IS INSPIRED BY GOD



All scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do right. 2 Timothy 3:16

The New Testament teaches us that there is value in reading the Old Testament.

THE OT PROVIDES ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE



Such things were written in the scriptures long ago to teach us...and to give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled. Romans 15:4

When I look at the life of Joseph in Genesis 37-50, I'm encouraged to be patient knowing it can take a long time for God to reveal His plans and purposes, but it's certainly worth the wait.

When I read about the life of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1, I learn that even when I feel alone or forgotten, God sees me, He sees every tear, He hears every prayer.

The book of Job teaches me that God is working on things in my life even when I don't understand why my circumstances have seemingly turned for the worse.

THE OT TEACHES US WHAT NOT TO DO



These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did. 1 Corinthians 10:6

David's adultery shows how one impulsive, sinful act completely tore his family apart. Moses' being prohibited from entering the promised land because he sinned in anger shows us how anger can cause us to lose things God wanted for us, and also that God disciplines leaders at a higher level than others.

There are so many examples like this in the Old Testament, where we see the mistakes people made, and how God responded to them.

THE OT TEACHES US WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO GOD

Some of those laws we like to skip over in books like Leviticus show us what God's priorities are. Some of the laws were set up to take care of the poor and less fortunate. Other laws reveal God's design and desire that sexual relations only occur within the context of marriage between a man and a woman. Don't brush past these! Even if they don't specifically apply today, they help us better understand what God wants.

THE OT REVEALS THE CHARACTER OF GOD

If you want to know what God is like, read the Old Testament. For example, we see how merciful God is. David committed murder and adultery, but God had mercy on him. Throughout the Old Testament we see the character of God revealed in how He deals with certain individuals and nations.

THE OT CONTAINS THE MOST ACCURATE PROPHECY

In the Old Testament there are prophecies about individuals and events that were given hundreds of years before they were fulfilled. These prophecies are so detailed and accurate that some skeptics try to claim they were written later on. But the detail is solid proof that our Bible is written by God, not by man.

THE OT IS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTANDING THE NT

It's impossible to fully understand the need we have for Jesus without understanding what happened in the Old Testament, where mankind repeatedly failed to live up to the holy standard God set for us. It's impossible for us, and that's exactly why we need a savior in Jesus Christ to be our righteousness so we can be reconciled to God and accepted by Him.

So get outside your comfort zone of Bible reading and dig into the Old Testament, because there is immense spiritual value to be found there.



Common Bible study mistakes to avoid, Part 1

Here are 10 of the most common mistakes people make when studying the Bible. My goal in giving these to you is so that as you're studying, you can catch yourself if you start to do any of these things!

NOT STARTING YOUR BIBLE STUDY WITH PRAYER



Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions. Psalm 119:18

The Bible is not some textbook or article. It's the written word of God. We can't understand it unless the Holy Spirit helps us. So always spend at least a moment or two in prayer before you dive in.

ELEVATING YOUR EXPERIENCE ABOVE SCRIPTURE

Sometimes you may have an experience in church that feels so powerful and real that you say (consciously or subconsciously) that you're not willing to let go of that experience no matter what the Bible may say about it. If your experience is in any way contradictory to what the Bible says, it's not valid.

READING THE BIBLE INSTEAD OF STUDYING IT

If we're honest about it, many of us are very lazy in our Bible study. We get to a verse that's kind of difficult, and we just skip past it instead of being willing to do the hard work to figure out exactly what it means.

USING THE BIBLE AS A SELF-HELP MANUAL

Sometimes we skip over portions of scripture we assume can't help us because they don't have some immediately obvious life application, like most of the Old Testament or the book of Revelation. We avoid books that don't make us feel better about our situation. As a result, we reduce the Bible down to only a few books, such as the Psalms and Proverbs and gospels, instead of realizing that the entire Bible has value for our lives—even the darker portions.

TRUSTING IN SOMEONE ELSE'S INTERPRETATION

It's okay to trust good preachers, but we shouldn't do that without checking and studying for ourselves to make sure the preacher is not twisting the word to suit their own purposes. Never assume that what you're being told about the word of God is true without checking for yourself!

ALLOWING OUR WORLDVIEW TO INFLUENCE HOW WE INTERPRET THE BIBLE

An example of this is if you believe that some people are “good” so they should go to heaven. You might have some neighbors who are nice, charitable people, but they're Muslims. In your mind, it doesn't make logical sense that they would go to hell if they died. When you read the Bible with that perspective, you try to make what you read fit that perspective instead of what it actually says, which is that none of us is “good” and without the covering of Christ's sacrifice, we are separated from God eternally. The Bible should shape how we view the world, not the other way around.

PICKING WHICH VERSES OF THE BIBLE WE WANT TO OBSERVE

I call this “cherry picking” the Bible. We love to read verses about God forgiving us, but don't so much like verses about us having to forgive others. We agree with verses that say homosexuality is a sin, but don't like ones that call us to be celibate until marriage. You either believe all of the Bible, or none of it.

TAKING VERSES OUT OF CONTEXT AND FORMING A THEOLOGY AROUND IT

You have to remember that the Bible was written for us, not to us. There is a certain historical context the Bible was written to. When we read and study, we have to figure out the author's original intent.

Let's take Philippians 4:13. You might see someone put that on a sign at a football game, as if to say through God's strength your team can win the game. I'm sorry, but I don't think that's what the apostle Paul was referring to when he wrote that. He was in prison and writing to a church, telling them he could be content even in the most difficult circumstances.

NOT COMPARING THE BIBLE WITH THE BIBLE

The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible. When you come across a difficult verse, ask what the rest of the Bible has to say about the topic, so you can get a theology of that topic, a well-rounded idea of what God has to say about something.

THINKING THAT YOU KNOW EVERYTHING AND THERE'S NOTHING MORE TO LEARN

This is common to people with high levels of theological education. It's easy to be closed-minded to the fact that some of your positions or beliefs might not be accurate. We have to be open to God adjusting our beliefs on topics if He chooses to show us something different.



Common Bible study mistakes to avoid, Part 2

Bible interpretation can be tricky, and if you get it wrong, it can be costly to your spiritual walk with God. But there are some simple principles to be aware of that can keep you from making big mistakes when interpreting and applying the word of God.

SEPARATE ISRAEL FROM THE CHURCH

You have to understand that there is a difference in how God dealt with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, and how God deals with Christians in the New Testament and beyond.

Read the Old Testament in terms of getting a sense for God's heart, and finding the timeless truths from what you read about God in the OT.

An example is the Sabbath. Christians are not under a mandate from God to keep the Sabbath like Israel did in the Old Testament. But what was the heart behind God giving that law to Israel? God is telling us that He wants us, and we need to, rest and enjoy His presence at times.

The Old Testament says to stone a woman who has sex outside of marriage. We are obviously not mandated to do that now, but the heart behind it was that purity, virginity, and our sexuality are important to God and sex should be reserved for marriage.

God ordered people in the Old Testament not to reap the harvest on all parts of their land, so there would be some left for the poor to eat. We don't have to do that, but God desires us to be generous to those who are less fortunate.

God sent prophets to warn people about the judgment for their sins. The heart behind that is that God is patient and loving, and gives us chances to turn from sin. However, we never know when He will choose to discipline us if we don't turn.

SEPARATE PRESCRIPTIVE EVENTS AND DESCRIPTIVE EVENTS

A descriptive event is when the author describes something that was happening, but is not intending for it to be universally practiced.

A prescriptive event is when the author describes something that should be the universal experience of every believer. Every single believer should grow spiritually, pray, fast, deny their flesh. These are prescriptive.

But when we read in the Old Testament that David is praying against his enemies in a seemingly very aggressive way. That doesn't mean the Bible is telling us we should also pray like that. It's simply describing how David prayed and how he felt at that time. When Gideon asks God for a sign to know whether God was talking, that was descriptive, but doesn't mean we get a sign every time we ask for one. In Acts, the apostles healed people through laying hands, but that doesn't mean every Christian can do that. It was descriptive.

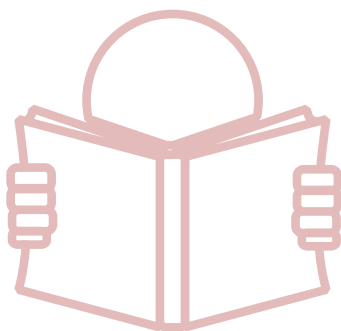
PAY ATTENTION TO THE GENRE YOU ARE READING

The Bible is written in a variety of literary styles. Poetry, parables, prophecy, wisdom, laws, letters, narratives, etc. You can't interpret all those styles the same way, or you'll get very confused!

For example, Proverbs is a book of general principles, not specific promises that can be counted on in every individual situation. If you interpret it as a book of things that will happen in every situation, you'll find yourself confused and disappointed.

If you read the law, you don't have to follow every specific law, but you have to look for God's heart and see what's repeated in the New Testament.

When reading prophecy, you need to know what's literal and what's symbolic. When reading poetry, understand that it's an expression of emotion, not always an example to follow.



Why am I not getting anything out of Bible study?

Does your Bible study feel dry, boring, or even like a waste of time? There's probably a reason for that, and I have 10 of them that just might apply to you! The good news is that you're not alone, and this problem can be fixed!

YOU DON'T HAVE A PLAN

If you wake up every morning and just flip through your Bible wondering what to read without a plan or structure, your time with God is not going to be vibrant, and you're not going to look forward to it.

YOU'RE STAYING ON THE SURFACE

If you've been a Christian or been in church for a while, you probably have a good sense for what the overall story of the Bible is. So if you just keep reading the same stories over and over again, that's not going to be very exciting. There's a deeper level God wants to take you to in your Bible study than just surface-level, repetitive reading.

If you go to the ocean and look at the surface every day, you'll see pretty much the same thing.

But if you were to go deep sea diving, you would discover an immense amount of life and activity that you would never have been able to view from the beach. That's what it's like when you start studying the Bible instead of just reading it.

Take the time in your Bible study to learn the context of the passage you're reading, the background, the author, the audience, and other key insights into the text.

YOU'RE DISTRACTED

It's hard to have a good Bible study if you're sitting by your phone and there are alerts, text messages, emails, and phone calls buzzing you all throughout. Or, if you're mentally preoccupied with the other things you have to do that day, and your attention is not fully on the word of God. Set a time in the day with the least potential for distractions and interruptions, and stick to that consistently for Bible study.

YOU FEEL DISCONNECTED FROM GOD

Disconnection from God can happen for several reasons. It could be caused by resentment between you and God, maybe caused by a disappointment or an unmet expectation you had. This can cause you to not want to spend time with God, because you're blaming Him for something that has happened in your life. Identify any possible barriers or negative feelings toward God, and explore why they might be there.

YOU DON'T FIND IT RELEVANT TO YOUR LIFE

You're right! Not every single verse is going to be relevant to your life (like the genealogies!) But, a majority of the Bible is relevant for your life. You just might not be able to properly interpret it. Learning how to properly interpret the Bible will help you unlock relevant applications.

YOU DON'T PRAY BEFOREHAND

The word of God is just that—it is the word of God, from God, to us. If we treat it like it's some textbook, we are not considering that this book is divine revelation from God that requires the Spirit of God in order for us to understand that. Ask God every time you read to reveal what He wants you to see.

YOU'RE NOT CONSISTENT

If we only go to God when we need something, or occasionally, we will not get what we should out of Bible study. You get out of it what you put in. If you put your Bible on the shelf for two weeks, that's two weeks of worldly influences cluttering your spirit without any time with God to set your mind on the things of God. That clutter obstructs your ability to hear from God, and you feel disconnected.

YOUR EXPECTATIONS ARE TOO HIGH

Some of us believe that every time we open the Bible, we're supposed to hear a grand message from heaven that blows our minds away. But much of Bible study is about discipline. It requires practice, patience, and perseverance. It won't always feel good, but it will be good for you. It's not always for this moment, but you are planting seeds in your spirit for the future so the Holy Spirit can pull that out at the right time. What you're reading today may not be for today.

YOU'RE DEALING WITH SIN

If you're living in sin and spend time dwelling on sinful thoughts, it becomes difficult to connect with God. You don't feel worthy for God to speak to you. Sin blocks us from intimacy with God. We need to approach God and the Bible with a humble and contrite heart. Confess all sin, accept and receive God's forgiveness, then get into the word.

YOU ARE NOT CONVINCED THAT THE BIBLE "WORKS"

If you've spent time in God's word and didn't see the life change you wanted, you might think the Bible isn't worth your time. But you should not try to have a transactional relationship with God, as if He owes you something because you spent time reading the Bible. Try approaching Bible study with fresh eyes and without an agenda to get something materially from God.



Simple secrets to a 30-minute daily devotional

Everyone wants to start the new year off right, and there's no better way to do that than to create a habit of spending time with God and studying His word. Almost every Christian, at one time or another, has struggled to maintain consistency in their quiet time with God—myself included. I've let the busyness of life and so many different things get in the way of the most important thing.

That's why I created a very simple template for you to use to spend at least 30 minutes with God every single day, along with a 7-day challenge you can use to kick start your Bible study habit.

This method might seem to have a lot of steps, but there are really just two acronyms you need to remember: STOP, and RAMP.

PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

You never want to just sit down and start reading the Bible without talking to God first. After all, that's what Bible study is all about, really—communicating with God. We talk to God in prayer and we hear from God in His word. But what should you pray about? That's where "STOP" comes in. That stands for sin, thanksgiving, others, and petition, and is your guide to an effective 5-minute prayer.

Sin. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Even after we're saved, we're still going to fall short at some times and in some ways. One of the most damaging effects of sin, besides the fact that it violates the holiness of God, is that it hinders our ability to have fellowship with God when we don't confess it and ask for God's forgiveness, so that we can come before God with clean hands and a pure heart, unburdened by guilt or shame. Before anything else, confess your sin to God.



"If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Psalm 66:18).

Thanksgiving. Next, give thanks to God. Too often we rush into prayer to ask for things, but we need to take some time every day to thank God for what He's given us, what He's done for us, and for who He is to us.



"And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20)

Others. That's right, we're three quarters of the way through our prayer and we still haven't asked God for anything for ourselves! After confessing sin and thanking God, we need to intercede on behalf of others. Now is the time to pray for those people you said you'd pray for, and to ask God if there are any needs of others in your life that you need to bring before Him.



"I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them" (1 Timothy 2:1)

Petition. Now is the time to bring your own concerns and requests to God. And isn't it so much better to not just run to God only when you have something to ask Him? This prayer format helps you have a relationship with God that isn't so self-centered. But make no mistake, God wants us to bring Him our every worry and need, because He loves us and loves to answer our prayers for our good and His glory!



"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

QUIET TIME

After just five short minutes in prayer, you're already in a great place of fellowship with God and now you're ready to read His word with eyes to see, ears to hear, and a spirit ready to receive what He has to say. So it's time to RAMP things up: Read, apply, meditate, and pray.

Read a passage of scripture (10 minutes) Open up the Bible and read a passage. It doesn't really matter what the passage is—it could be a part of a Bible plan, it could be something your pastor preached about in church, or it could honestly be just something God led you to that doesn't have any apparent connection to anything in your life at the moment.

The great thing about God's word is that every single chapter and verse has value. Whatever you choose to read, it's best if you read it in two translations for full clarity: Once in a very readable translation like the New Living Translation, and then in a more literal translation such as the English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, or the New King James Version.

Apply (10 minutes). Christians don't just read for knowledge or memorization. We read to know how we should live and what we should do. That's why your devotional time should include some time dedicated to considering how what you read applies to your life. And fortunately for you, I have a simple formula for this as well: 3-2-1. Write down three things you learned, two ways to apply it (whether it's work, family, relationships, whatever the case may be) and one thing you need to pray about that day.

Meditate (4 minutes) After you're done reading and applying, don't just hop up and go about your day! Give it some time to sink in. Take four minutes and simply sit quietly in the presence of God, thinking deeply about what you just read and seeing if God has something to speak to you directly through the Holy Spirit. Don't be in a hurry here—this step is crucial.

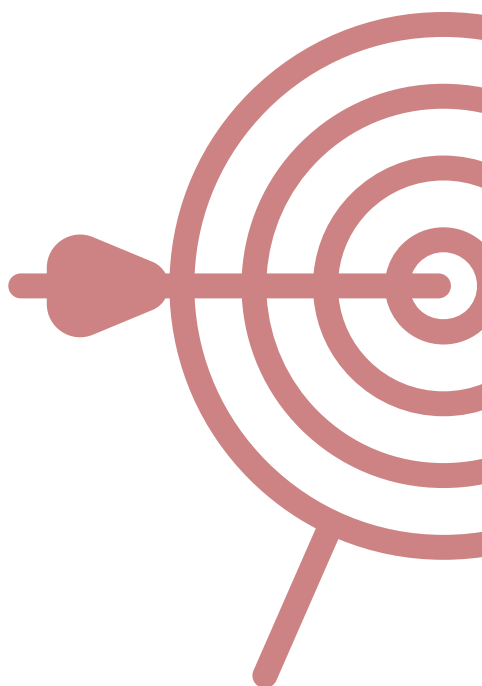
Pray (1 minute). Finally, before you go forward into your day, take one more minute and just pray to God again. Ask Him to help you remember and live out the Word you just read. Ask Him to show you areas of application or opportunities to share what you've learned with others.

I want to emphasize that this is only a template, not a rigid schedule. Certainly you might get into your time with God and realize five minutes isn't enough time for prayer or you want to read for more than 10 minutes, and that's great! Above all, follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, not a schedule. But with this template, you can guarantee you can have a full, complete time with God in a minimum of 30 minutes, every single day!

I'll leave you with a Bible reading challenge you can complete over the next week that you can use to immediately apply this template to your Bible study!

Over the next 7 days, you can get through the book of 1 John—a short book that is packed with truth!

- Day 1 – 1 John 1:1-10
- Day 2 – 1 John 2:1-14
- Day 3 – 1 John 2:15-29
- Day 4 – 1 John 3:1-10
- Day 5 – 1 John 3:11-24
- Day 6 – 1 John 4:1-21
- Day 7 – 1 John 5:1-21



Simple morning devotional routine using Proverbs

I love spending quiet time with God in the morning. To make the most out of that limited time, I make sure I have a plan in place so I don't spend half the time figuring out what to read in the Bible. Sometimes I'm studying a passage, or reading through a book, or doing a character study. But one of my favorite and most effective ways to spend devotional time is to read a book from Proverbs every day. And since there are 31 chapters, and most months have 30 or 31 days, a simple way to choose what to read is just to read the proverb that corresponds with the day of the month, and briefly write down every day what God shows you through that chapter! At the time of writing this, it's April 22. So this morning, I read Proverbs 22, and I want to share my observations as an example of how rich and productive this type of devotional can be.

REPUTATION



Choose a good reputation over great riches; being held in high esteem is better than silver or gold. Proverbs 22:1

It takes a lifetime to build a good reputation, but only a second to lose it. Riches can come and go in no time. A good reputation is hard to build, and even harder to rebuild if you lose it.

If you lose money, there are clear, straightforward ways you can earn it back. But when you lose your reputation, it is very difficult to regain. Focus on your character more than you focus on the pursuit of wealth.

WISDOM



A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences. Proverbs 22:3

Wise people see danger ahead and adjust their lives based on what they see. Simple or foolish people see potential danger, and just keep on going down the path, without regard for the trouble they're about to cause for themselves. This can apply in business, or marriage, but mostly where I see this apply is in dating relationships. I've talked to so many people who persist in relationships when God has given every possible warning sign to that they need to end it and get out before it causes serious pain. The wise person heeds those signs and warnings, but the foolish person pays the price by not changing anything. Listen to God and change your path when you see danger—don't learn the hard way!

WICKEDNESS VS. RIGHTEOUSNESS



Corrupt people walk a thorny, treacherous road; whoever values life will avoid it. Proverbs 22:5

When you live a wicked, sinful life, you're walking a path that takes you right into the natural pitfalls the enemy has set for you. You can avoid a lot of trouble in life by living holy. Let's take the example of sex before marriage. When you have sex before marriage, you're on a path that potentially includes unplanned pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, and emotional and relational pain. But if you follow God's plan for sex, within marriage, you're not at risk of those outcomes. Choosing righteousness automatically saves you from a lot of risk and danger.

DEBT



*Just as the rich rule the poor, so the borrower is servant to the lender.
Proverbs 22:7*

When you're in debt, you're under the control of whoever you owe. In order to be freed up to do God's will with the resources He gives you, avoid debt whenever possible and make getting out of debt a top priority in your life.

GENEROSITY



*Blessed are those who are generous, because they feed the poor.
Proverbs 22:9*

The world will tell you that the way to be blessed is to make as much money as possible. But the Bible says the way to blessing (sometimes financial, sometimes spiritual) is to give as much money away to those in need as you can. So the question you need to wrestle with is whether people who know you would consider you to be stingy, or whether they'd view you as generous. You might be surprised how other people view you versus how you view yourself.

LAZINESS AND FEAR



The lazy person claims, "There's a lion out there! If I go outside, I might be killed!" Proverbs 22:13

The clear meaning of this verse relates to a lazy person coming up with an excuse not to get things done. Productive people look for ways to make things happen, while lazy people search for reasons why they can't get the job done.

But this verse also relates to fear. Sometimes we as Christians will avoid doing something God has called us to do because of the mere possibility that something bad could happen. We can't be controlled and dominated by fear. Of course we should be wise in our actions, but we can't have a fearful mentality that keeps us from following God in faith.

ANGER



Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul. Proverbs 22:24-25

These verses warn against entering into relationships with people who display angry character. People who have road rage, or those who curse a lot, or raise their voice all the time, or slam doors, or hang up on you. You want to avoid entering into friendships, dating relationship, or especially marriages with people like this, because as verse 25 says, you may become an angry person yourself and get caught in the trap of their behavior.

SUCCESS



Do you see any truly competent workers? They will serve kings rather than working for ordinary people. Proverbs 22:29

The saying goes that the only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary. Success comes to those who work hard, and who have a high standard of excellence for what they do. If you put in the time and effort to become skilled at what you do, people will take notice and your position will be elevated so that you're working for great people.

Look how many helpful lessons came from just this one proverb. If you do this every day, month in and month out, you will become a much wiser individual by putting God's word in your mind and making the decisions he wants you to make!



[Watch the video on YouTube!](#)

How to get creative with your devotional time

Have you ever resolved to spend more time in the Word of God, but that resolution fails because you don't really know how to make that happen? I have 10 creative ways that you can make your devotional time with God exciting and productive.

LISTEN TO AN AUDIO BIBLE

This is perfect for people who tend to fall asleep while reading the Bible, or people who feel like they don't have time. This way, you can listen to the Bible at the gym or in your car or while cleaning your house.

READ THE DAILY PROVERB

There are 31 chapters in the book of Proverbs, and there are usually 30 or 31 days in a month. So, a good habit is to read the Proverb that corresponds with the day of the month, which means you're exposing yourself to great biblical wisdom every single day!

SPENDING TIME IN PRAYER

There may be some mornings where you don't feel like reading the Bible. That's okay! It's also valuable to spend time in communication with God through prayer. Pray for your day, your family, your friends, your church, your job, or whatever is going on, and listen to God speak to your heart.

LISTENING TO WORSHIP MUSIC

This is another way to have devotional time with God that doesn't necessarily require you to crack open your Bible and sit down and read. [Good worship music](#) can speak to you by singing of who God is, what He has done, and what He is in your life.

LISTENING TO PODCASTS

This is another thing you can do on the way to work or to run errands. Turn off the radio and listen to some [great Bible teaching and Christian podcasts](#) to set your mind on the things of God as you go throughout your day!

JOURNALING AND MEDITATION

You may just want to get alone with God, a pen, and paper to write down things going on in your life, things God has done, or write down your prayers.

READ A DAILY DEVOTIONAL BOOK

There are many [awesome books](#) that have short readings based on the Bible that take 15-20 minutes per day of reading. These are a good supplement at times, but PLEASE do not let this fully replace your own time reading the actual Bible!

READ A SPIRITUAL BOOK

Reading a book that is aligned with a spiritual issue or topic can be a helpful devotional time, as long as the book includes a lot of scripture, and again, does not fully replace your time in the Bible itself.

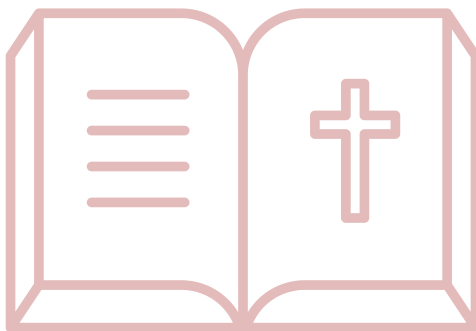
READ A ONE-YEAR BIBLE PLAN

There are some awesome online plans that will get you a suggested reading plan that, if you follow it, will take you through the entire Bible in one year in a very manageable way. You can find these [online](#), in [Bible apps](#), or you can even purchase a hard copy one-year Bible.

READ YOUR BIBLE!

There is no replacement for actually sitting down and reading God's word. Pick a topic, book, or character and study through the scriptures!

The key is to mix it up so your devotional time doesn't get stale or mechanical. Combine these methods to make sure your devotional time is something you look forward to every day!



How to have a killer quiet time with God

Have you ever resolved to spend more time in the Word of God, but that resolution fails because you don't really know how to make that happen? I have 10 creative ways that you can make your devotional time with God exciting and productive.

HAVE A TALK



Open my eyes that I may see the wonderful truths written in your instructions. Psalm 119:18

Before you ever open up your Bible, you should pray to God that He would open your eyes so you can see what He wants you to see in His word. The Bible is not a textbook! It requires God's Spirit to help you understand it.

CHOOSE A TIME

It's important to pick a set, regular time to get alone with God. This needs to be a time that you're not in a hurry so you're not rushing in and out of God's word quickly, hoping to get some kind of grand connection in a few minutes.

Pick a time when you are unlikely to be interrupted, and make sure you separate from your phone if you can so you're not disturbed or distracted by calls, texts, or notifications while you're trying to hear from God.

CHOOSE A TYPE

This is huge. You need to decide what type of Bible study you're going to do. If you don't enter your quiet time with a plan, you can end up spending more time trying to decide what to read than you spend actually reading and praying!

Some examples of types of Bible studies include: Topical studies, where you pick a topic relevant to your life and seek out everything the Bible has to say about it; character studies, where you pick a specific character from the Bible and study their life for spiritual insights; or book studies, where you camp out in a single book for a period of time and read it in multiple translations.

It doesn't matter so much which method you choose, it just matters that you pick one so you don't waste your quiet time searching aimlessly!

GET SOME TOOLS



Study to show yourself approved unto God. 2 Timothy 2:15

It's God's desire for every Christian to eventually graduate from simply reading the Bible to actually studying the Bible. In order to do that, you need some tools outside of the Bible to help.

A good starting point is purchasing a good study Bible. I personally recommend the Life Application Study Bible, which comes in multiple translations. It has character profiles, notes, cross references, and numerous other resources to give you more information about the biblical text.

Next, you need a good Bible dictionary. That way when you come across a word that you don't know the meaning of, you can consult the dictionary and get all the background on what that word means, and what it means in the specific context in which it's used.

Another important Bible study tool is a concordance. With a concordance, you can look up words in the Bible to find the original Greek or Hebrew word and meaning, and see how many times and where else in the Bible that word is used. This will give you a more full understanding of the word and more depth in how it's applied.

Finally, you need a good commentary. This is a book written by a Bible scholar that helps you understand anything you're reading in the Bible.

The great news is that you can access all of these tools online for free! Check out [Bible Study Tools](#) for everything you need.

CHOOSE A TRANSLATION

Choose a version that is easy to understand and read! Some people enjoy reading the King James Version, but most people prefer (and I recommend) something a little bit easier to read, such as the New Living Translation or the New International Version.

YOU WILL TRANSFORM

The ultimate goal of Bible study is not to just gain information, but to gain true transformation. To do that, I want you to ask yourself these four questions for every text you read:

1. Is there a command to obey?
2. Is there an attitude to change?
3. Is there a sin to avoid?
4. Is there an example to follow?

Once you've asked yourself those questions, answer them and think about how you can apply what you've learned to your relationships, your personal life, your work, or your ministry.



Power Tips to boost your Bible study

Let's face it. Sometimes Bible study can feel confusing, frustrating, overwhelming, or just plain boring. But it doesn't have to be that way, and I have five tips on how to boost your Bible study to avoid those common pitfalls!

STUDY A PARTICULAR BOOK OF THE BIBLE EXCLUSIVELY

Commit to reading a book, depending on the length, over a set period of time in various translations. Get the background of the book through a study Bible or commentary before you read it, so you can fit the book in the bigger context of the Bible story.

STUDY A PARTICULAR TOPIC IN THE BIBLE

When you are struggling in a particular area of life, this can be a good way to focus your Bible study to have real-life benefits to your situation. Choose a topic or word and go to a concordance or online tool to find all the scriptures in the Bible related to that topic, which will give you a full picture of what the Bible has to say.

STUDY A PARTICULAR CHARACTER IN THE BIBLE

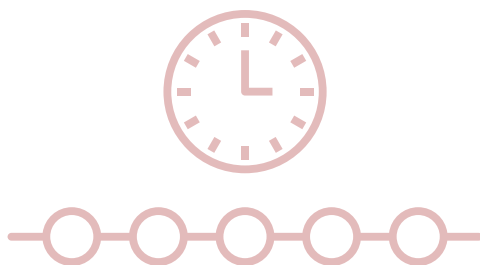
Choose a character like David, Paul, Esther, or whoever, and look at how God worked in their lives, what life lessons you can learn from them, and what were the good and bad decisions they made in their lives. This gives you clear insight into the heart of God, and what is important to Him.

USE A DAILY BIBLE READING PLAN

I don't prefer this method personally, because they don't always take you deep enough in the scriptures. They can also keep the Holy Spirit from directing my study daily because I'm locked into reading a particular plan. You can go in this direction as a starting point if you need some structure, but I don't prefer it.

READ THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

The Bible is not laid out in chronological order. For example, Esther is in the middle of the Old Testament, but chronologically it is actually the end of the Old Testament period. Job is in the middle of the Old Testament, but Job's life actually came before Abraham's life. Psalms were written by David, so those might be more helpful to read alongside the narrative of David's life. Reading chronologically can really help make sense of the larger Bible narrative.



How to study the Bible by topic

Every so often I open up my Bible and I don't know what to study. I might not have a good plan, or I just might not be feeling it that day.

A good thing to do in that case is to ask yourself what topic you want to look into, and I can give you some free resources that will help you do that.

First let's lay out some questions that will help you choose a topic.

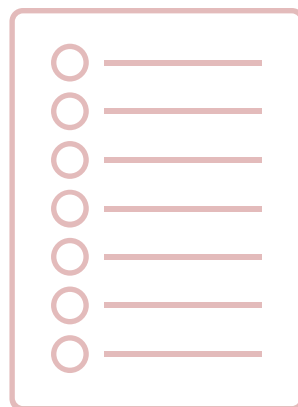
- What am I struggling with the most in my Christian walk?
- What areas do I sense that the Holy Spirit has been prompting me to respond to?
- In what areas are my relationships struggling?
- What topics have I always wanted to know more about?

Once you've selected a topic, go to a free website called BibleStudyTools.com.

Click on "study" on the top left, which will open up a dropdown menu. Click on "concordances." Scroll down and click on "Nave's Topical Bible."

Here, a large list of topics is organized alphabetically for your selection. When you choose a topic, you get a comprehensive list of verse and passages in the Bible that relate to faith. It breaks those topics down by the way the topic is applied or the different references. For example, if you select the topic “faith,” you’ll find a TON of passages to study, which would surely be more than you could really study in any one study session. It also points you to related topics that can launch you into even further study.

I believe this will help you out immensely when you don’t know what to study, or when you have a specific issue that you’re dealing with and you need to know everything God has said on that topic.



How to do a Greek word study

When reading the Bible, it can be helpful to read it in the original languages in which it was written, which are Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

Let's say you're watching TV at home, but it's only in black and white with low quality sound. You may still get the basics of what's going on, but there is plenty of detail and depth you can miss, which you can only get if you're watching in high definition with surround sound.

That's what it's like when you're able to read the Bible using the Hebrew and Greek words, not just in the English translation.

The easiest way to do this is to go to a website called BibleStudyTools.com. This website, and all its resources, are totally free

Now these instructions are made more clear when you can see it on video, so if you can, I encourage you to check out the video linked at the bottom of this chapter to see me walk through this entire process!

When you get to the homepage, click the “read” tab at the top of the page, and select “Interlinear Bible.” At that point, you can choose what translation you want to use.

In the search bar, type in the scripture reference where the word is that you want to find in the Greek or Hebrew.

Let's take 1 Corinthians 7:1 as an example.



Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. 1 Corinthians 7:1

When you pull up this scripture in the interlinear Bible, you'll see the verse in English and then below it you'll see the verse in the original language. You'll also see that there are hyperlinks on words within the English verse.

So when you take a verse like this, which seems really strange and extreme in the English, it's good to go deeper to figure out what the original meaning was. If you click on the word "touch," you'll see that it is the Greek word "hapto."

What you find is that the word "touch" as it is used here is much deeper and more nuanced than you would think. It means "to fasten to, adhere to; to fasten fire to a thing, kindle, set of fire." This word doesn't mean physical touch. It means touching a woman with the purpose of igniting sexual desire within her.

You can also see on this page other uses of this word in other places in the Bible, to see how it was used. For example, in Acts 28:2 the word "hapto" is used literally to refer to kindling an actual fire.

Let's do another one, James 1:3-4:



...knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:3-4

“Perfect” here is the Greek word “Teleios.” There are several definitions listed, but when it is referring specifically to men, it means “full grown, adult, of full age, mature.” So it is actually saying that when trials come into your life, they mature you as a Christian when you endure them. You become someone who has experience in a way that produces endurance and grows your faith. It doesn’t mean literal perfection.

One more example, 2 Timothy 3:16



All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction for training in righteousness. 2 Timothy 3:16

What does that mean, that all scripture is “inspired” by God? Did God write the Bible, or man? So when you click on “inspire,” you see it’s a compound Greek word, “Theopneustos.” You see under Word Origins some numbers that will take you to the two words Paul combined here to make a word that is only used one place in the entire Bible.

The first part of this word is “theos,” which is the word for God. The second part is the word “pneo”, the word meaning “to breath, to blow.” When you put these words together, you get “god-breathed,” which is clearer than the word inspired. God literally breathed into the writers of scripture what He wanted them to write.

Using an interlinear Bible to study in Greek and Hebrew can open up the word of God in a way you probably thought only trained pastors and theologians could do!



How to understand Old Testament prophecy

There is a huge chunk of books in the Old Testament of the Bible that most Christians just don't read—and may have never read. When is the last time you took a look at the book of Habbakuk? Some Christians just feel these books don't provide enough present-day application, or that they're too hard to understand. But every book in the word of God is useful in some way, otherwise God would not have let it for us. That's why I want to give you six tips on how to better understand the prophetic books of the Bible.

KNOW THE BASIC MESSAGE

All of the prophetic books served one or more of three main purposes. The first purpose is to expose sin. That could include idolatry, sexual immorality, oppression of the poor, etc. The prophets were often sent to call people or nations out for their sinful behavior. The next purpose of the prophetic books was to warn people of the coming judgment of God against the aforementioned sins. And third, prophets often called people to repentance, imploring them to turn from their sinful ways and return to God before the judgment and punishment comes.

KNOW THE TIME IN WHICH THE PROPHET SPOKE

The prophetic books fall into one of three categories: Pre-captivity, during captivity, and post-captivity. The captivity being referred to here is the period of time when God allowed the wicked nation of Babylon to destroy Jerusalem and take its inhabitants captive, removing them from their home and forcing them to live in Babylon for about 70 years (605-536 B.C.).

Some prophets were called by God to minister to the people of Israel before the captivity occurred, giving them an opportunity to repent—which they didn't do. Other prophets, such as Jeremiah or Daniel, spoke to the people of Israel during that 70-year period of captivity to encourage them while they were in the midst of that difficult time. It's in that context that the verse Jeremiah 29:11 (I know the plans I have for you) was written.

Other prophets, like Malachi, Haggai, and Zechariah, were sent to warn Israel after the captivity, once they had returned to Jerusalem, telling them not to fall back into the old, sinful ways that led them to be exiled in the first place.

KNOW THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It's important to know that the prophetic books don't provide any historical value to the Old Testament. There are 12 books in the Old Testament, other than the Pentateuch, which provide historical content. All other books in the OT are supplementary information. For example, the book of Proverbs does not provide any history, but it supplements information about its author King Solomon, whose historical narrative is found in the book of 1 Kings.

All the Old Testament prophets ministered during time periods that were recorded in the book of 2 Kings, Ezra, or Nehemiah. You can usually identify that time period because the prophets often mentioned who was king at the time they were ministering to Israel.

KNOW THE AUDIENCE

This one is simple—know who the prophet was talking to. Sometimes the audience was the northern kingdom of Israel or the southern kingdom of Judah. Other times prophets ministered to foreign nations. Knowing the audience is key to understanding the content.

IMMEDIATE VS. FUTURE FULFILLMENT

Not all the prophecies in the Old Testament have been fulfilled, and for some of these prophecies, there was both an immediate fulfillment and a future fulfillment.

For example, the captivity of Israel was an immediate fulfillment of prophecy. Other prophecies weren't fulfilled until centuries later when Jesus Christ came. Some other prophecies, such as promises God has made to Israel, have not yet come to pass, and we are still looking forward to those things taking place.

USE A COMMENTARY!

You don't have to rely on your own knowledge and ability to read and interpret. God has blessed us with the insight of numerous biblical scholars who have written commentaries that help us understand the sometimes difficult symbolism that is in the prophetic books.

Ezekiel is a good example of that. One commentary I would highly recommend is “Minor Prophets” by James Boice, and there are other great ones as well. Don't go it alone—utilize the many valuable resources passed on to us by those who have studied these books thoroughly!



The top 5 verses Christians take out of context

Have you ever heard someone quote something from the Bible and it makes you ask yourself, “Is that really what that means?” If so, it’s probably because it was quoted out of context, and that’s something that happens far too often in the Christian community. Let’s look at five of the verses most frequently misused.

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. Matthew 7:1

This verse gets used to promote tolerance by saying we don’t have the right to judge anyone for things they might do wrong. People might say “only God can judge me.” But we’re encouraged to make judgments throughout the Bible (1 Corinthians 5:11-13, John 7:24, for example).

However, in this passage of scripture Jesus isn’t saying don’t judge; He’s saying make sure we judge ourselves first so that we can then see clearly to make a correct judgment on someone else!



*...first, take the plank out of your own eye, then you will be able to see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.
Matthew 7:5*

Consider it pure joy...when you face various trials. James 1:2

You may have heard this used to say Christians are supposed to be happy when bad things are happening to them, and they're supposed to completely ignore the natural human emotions that come up in bad circumstances. But look at the context!

We aren't supposed to be happy that bad things are happening, but we're supposed to rejoice in what those trials will produce in our lives.



...because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance...let perseverance finish its work so you may be mature and complete. James 1:3-4

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. Matthew 18:20

Sometimes ministers will use this when no one shows up to the prayer meeting and they're trying to encourage the people who are there that they only need two or three people. Or, someone will think when they're going through something they need to get two or three people together to pray with or over them.

But there's no set number of people who need to be present in order for God to be present. Further, the context of this verse is about the process used to resolve conflicts between two people in a church.



But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses...Matthew 18:16

...speak those things that are not as though they are. Romans 4:17

This verse gets abused by Christians who say that if we have enough faith, we can create our own destiny simply by speaking something into existence. But have they actually read the verse? It's clearly attributing that power to God!



As it is written: I have made you the father of many nations. He is our father in God's sight, in whom Abraham believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. Romans 4:17

...by His stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53:5

People use this verse when they are praying over someone for healing, suggesting that Jesus' death on the cross purchased our physical healing. The problem with this is the word "heal" in Isaiah is used eight times, and each time it is used to refer to a spiritual healing, not a physical one.



But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities...and by his stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53:5

Peter comes along later in the New Testament to give further clarity on this:



He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross...'By His stripes you have been healed.' 1 Peter 2:24

We have to be careful when we speak for God and quote scripture, so that we're not misleading people and making the Bible say what we want to say. When you take the text out of context, you get conned, every time!



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